

## The Voice of the People

The democracy index measures the state of democracy in 167 countries. The index is compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a U.K. based company. Norway, Iceland, and Sweden lead the “full democracy” list with scores of 9.39 and above. The United States dropped from “full democracy” to “flawed democracy” in 2016, with a score of 7.98. Malaysia is also categorized in the same category with a score of 6.54. (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018). Many criteria go hand in hand with promoting democracy. For example, free and fair elections, sufficient check and balances for the governing authority, mechanisms for accountability, citizens’ engagement in politics, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, etc.

This coming 4th July, the United States commemorates the 242nd anniversary of Independence Day. In this article, I would like to state cases where we see democracy in action in the United States. Looking into the history of the United States, we can see that people who wanted change and acted upon those desires were the ones who brought about changes in the society. Such people, referred to as activists, include Benjamin Franklin (one of the founding fathers of the United States who fought against slavery), Martin Luther King Jr (an American Baptist minister known for advancing civil rights), and Lucy Stone (an advocate for women’s rights). Activists are people who can step up to bring about changes in the society. Being the first person to stand up for change requires courage, and the ability to influence. To influence others, an activist will need to do systematic research to prepare and present a compelling message that is empathetic and articulated. Meticulous planning and coordination of a team will be required to organize a movement to make a difference.

Americans elected their 45th president, Mr. Donald Trump in November 2016. On 27th January 2017, Trump signed an executive order 13769 – banning citizens from seven countries from entering the United States. Some call this the Muslim ban as the seven nations are all Muslim-majority countries. There were numerous protests and legal arguments challenging this ban. The protests came not only from the Muslim community but the general public. The federal court and judges blocked part of the ruling. When the second travel ban was issued, the travel ban was blocked by Judge Derrick Watson. In September, the third travel ban was signed. Protests are still on-going concerning this ban.

Another prominent issue is the gun control issue. There had been many cases of school shootings in the United States. The shooting on 14th February in Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Parkland, Florida recorded the highest number of casualties in all school shootings. Eighteen students were shot dead, and another 17 were injured in this incident. Hundreds of thousands of students nationwide joined the survivors for the “March for Our Lives.” They stepped out from their classrooms to demand reforms in the gun legislation. Florida Governor Rick Scott signed a stricter gun control law. The National Rifle Association immediately filed a lawsuit against the state of Florida. To date, there is still no significant reform regarding gun legislation. Rebecca Schneid, a survivor, said “We understand that this is a marathon and that we’ll be fighting for years. We’re just getting started. Now we have to use our rights as voters to make things change.”

Performing Arts subjects, like theatre, may help influence future generations to develop some of the traits needed for moral leadership. Through the playing of different characters and roles from different situations, eras, and cultural backgrounds, students can develop empathy and compassion towards those around them. Much hard work is required to deliver a play. Students need to work in teams, memorize scripts, align the text with their actions, and practice for perfection. Students need to step out of their comfort zone, trust their ability and their team to put on a performance. Standing in front of an audience, regardless of size, takes courage and self-confidence. Very few plays are individual performances. Therefore, cooperation and collaboration are essential in theatre. It is critical

that our educational system is such that we encourage the voice of the people to be heard. To develop a generation that will effectively advocate for current issues, we need to build our students more holistically. One possible measure to encourage holistic development is to give space to Performing Arts subjects like theatre or to integrate elements of theatre into existing syllabi.

Democracy is a journey. At times a country moves forward, at times another falls a few steps behind. Whether in the United States or Malaysia, the voice of the people is needed to ensure that democracy and human rights are observed. The education system is a channel to equip future generations to ask questions, present their thoughts and advocate for what they see as a better society. The general education requirements in the American Education system makes it compulsory for students to take subjects like philosophy, logic, theatre, religious studies, political and cultural studies, etc. These subjects will challenge students' perceptions, and also help them articulate their thoughts. Experience this holistic development through American Undergraduate Education.

## References

The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2018). *Democracy Index 2017* . The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited. Retrieved from The Economist Intelligence Unit.